

Pilot No. 4 : Enhance Citizen Participation

Focus: Local Planning Process

Purpose:

To determine whether strategies exist to make citizen participation more effective and meaningful and document *how* communities are making the process more meaningful

Participants:

State of Pennsylvania; Miami Beach, FL; Westchester County, NY;
City of Buffalo, NY

Pilot Description:

Working groups report that, at both the local and State level, public hearings do not provide adequate, effective vehicles for public involvement in the Consolidated Plan. However, public hearings are statutorily required and eliminating them would require statutory relief. To enhance public participation, some communities are supplementing public hearings with other avenues for public participation--broadcasting hearings on radio and TV, encouraging e-mail comments from citizens, and posting ConPlans on local government Web sites.

This pilot would consider strategies that enhance citizen participation. A ConPlan TA provider would look at existing strategies. In addition, the pilot would consider if different strategies are necessary to improve citizen participation at the State versus local levels and the impact of these changes on public participation in the ConPlan process. Another issue for this pilot group is addressing statutory requirements for public hearings. Participants would work with HUD to determine what statutory changes would be needed to allow alternatives to traditional public hearings.

Summary of Grantee Pilots:

State of Pennsylvania will replace one of two annual in-person public hearings with a virtual public hearing (chat room format) held over the Internet and the format of the plan will be changed to be more readable and concise to facilitate public understanding. Grantee expects to be complete by November 15, 2003.

Miami Beach, FL will explore ways to streamline the presentation of data, i.e., internet opportunities, cable access programming, and informational services to enhance the citizen participation process.

Westchester County, NY plans to replace their hard copy document with CD ROM-oriented internet viewable edition. They expect that providing the information electronically on CD-ROM and on the county's website will better convey the county's needs, the housing market and the selected strategies over the 5 years. They expect that the public and agencies will be better engaged and provide better feedback. They will measure attendance at meetings and visitors to the website.

City of Buffalo, NY "City of Buffalo, NY will explore techniques that might improve their current citizen participation process and options to incorporate a Citizen's Review Board into the process."

Pilot No. 4 Status as of October 31, 2003

Miami Beach, FL prepared and submitted a ConPlan that explored ways to streamline the presentation of data, i.e., such as use of Internet opportunities, cable access programming, and informational services to enhance the citizen participation process. The hearings and the workshops were advertised in the Miami Beach *Neighbors* section of the *Miami Herald*, and on the City's cable television station.

Westchester County, NY demonstrated the format they propose to use for the non-housing community development plan develop new ways to meet Con Plan Requirements, and enhance it at a recent meeting of the National Association of County, Community and Economic Development Association. The multimedia approach uses a variety of photographs, tables, and charts to show illustrate the new format that would be available on the Internet.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania plans to advertise their second public meeting for December 2003. They plan to go back to the traditional hearing and compare attendance to the attendance generated at the first hearing. They will receive written testimony in addition to in-person public participation. For the first hearing in August, they set up a conference on the same date to handle technical needs and inquiries. The information about the on-line public meeting was included in the public notice invitations sent out with the RHAC meetings and discussed at the six RHAC meetings.

This event was also publicized via an e-mail sent to all DCED grantees. The public meeting was held and participants pre-registered and provided their contact data. The meeting was an open forum for discussion and questions about the Consolidated Plan. 14 persons registered this year and seven people actually logged in. This number is far more than had attended the previous in-person meetings. There was comment that this Internet-type of public hearing access was more convenient for work and travel schedules. We will determine if our advertising and individual invitations increase our level of participation.

City of Buffalo, NY: In late August a fact finding mission was undertaken to learn more about the citizen participation practices in Buffalo, New York. Representatives from both HUD Headquarters and the Field Office conducted interviews with those involved in the process, which included; several citizen participation groups, Buffalo's Director for the Office of Strategic Planning and a member of Buffalo's Common Council. The results of such interviews and information obtained will be produced in a brief report detailing the current citizen participation practices in Buffalo. Since the fact finding mission began, the City of Buffalo, through the Office of Strategic Planning has begun looking at how other communities are effectively utilizing the citizen participation process and what techniques might improve their current process.

Local citizen groups have also been active in working toward improving the current process. Such efforts on their part have included; discussions with the City and HUD that would not only provide information on programs and process, but the current status of how activities are being carried out, as well as exploring options to incorporate a Citizen's Review Board into the process.